UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.6/1991/7
27 December 1990

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Thirty-fifth session
Vienna, 27 February-8 March 1991
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Preparations for the interregional consultation on women in public life

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

By resolution 44/77, the General Assembly endorsed the convening of a high-level interregional consultation on women in public life. The present report outlines the preparations that have been made for the Interregional Consultation on Women in Public Life, which will be held at the Hofburg Conference Centre at Vienna from 10 to 12 September 1991. The Commission is requested to review these preparations with a view to providing advice on the approach to be taken.

*E/CN.6/1991/1.

V.90-90558 7288T

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-third session, by resolution 33/2, recommended that the Economic and Social Council convene in 1991 a high-level interregional consultation on women in public life of a duration of not more than three days. The Council, by its decision 1989/129, endorsed the recommendation. The General Assembly, in resolution 44/77, also endorsed the convening of a consultation.

2. In his report on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (A/45/489), the Secretary-General proposed that the consultations be entitled "Women in Politics: the Interregional Consultation on Women in Public Life". On the basis of that report, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/127 by which it decided that the Consultation should be an intergovernmental meeting, urged Governments to participate actively in the Consultation, invited Governments and national institutions and organizations to provide extra-budgetary resources to facilitate preparations for the Consultation and requested the Secretary-General to take steps to assure the necessary servicing and support of the Consultation.

3. The present report describes the preparations being made for the Consultation, which will take place from 10 to 12 September 1991 in the Hofburg Conference Centre at Vienna. The Commission may wish to provide advice on the preparations as well as the arrangements for the Consultation itself.

I. PURPOSE, ORIENTATION AND REPORTING OF THE CONSULTATION

A. Purpose and orientation

4. In recommending the convening of the Consultation, the Commission emphasized the importance of the full participation of women in all spheres of society, bearing in mind the specific and urgent needs of the developing countries. It stressed the need for increasing the number of women at higher and the highest levels in public life. It recommended that the Consultation should discuss such issues as (a) a more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men at local, national and international decision-making levels in the political, economic and social fields; (b) factors facilitating or inhibiting the entry of women into public life; and (c) changing roles of women and men, and their impact on participation in policy formulation, the decision-making process and the implementation of national and international programmes. It recommended that the Consultation should make proposals with particular regard to the needs of developing countries in order to facilitate and ensure the rapid advancement of women in all sectors of public life.

5. The recommendations and conclusions arising from the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies were adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1990/15, annex. In paragraph 6 of that annex, it was stated:

> "That women are grossly underrepresented in political decision-making has been amply documented. This means that decisions on public policies that affect women's equality are still in the hands of men, who may not have the same incentive to pursue them as women.

> Despite indications that in some countries women, by voting for candidates or parties that promise to promote their interests, are beginning to decide the outcome of elections, the incidence of women in parliaments, political parties and in formal Government is still low. The situation will persist unless more women stand and are selected for office and are allowed to begin careers leading to senior management positions in the public sector and until women exercise their voting power in their own interests as well as in the interests of society."

On that basis, the Council adopted recommendation VI in resolution 1990/15, annex, that the Consultation:

> "Should have maximum participation by Governments and non-governmental organizations and should elaborate for the first half of the decade an agenda for political action that will mobilize all women to participate actively in the political process."

6. In the report of the Secretary-General (A/45/489, paras. 71-72), he noted that:

> "The importance of increasing the participation of women in politics was stressed during the review and appraisal of the Nairobi Strategies. There are almost no formal legal impediments to women exercising this right, meaning that the issue is one of practice rather than law. Politics for women in practice mostly means 'getting things done' and 'making a difference' at the grass-roots level, rather than engaging in more formal institutional politics or 'public life'. There is a gap between women's effective activism in the issues of immediate and often local importance to them, and their participation in the broader national and international arenas where the issues of concern to them may be submerged by the interests of an overwhelming majority of men. Moreover, women's perception of global issues is often different from that of men. It is at the sub-national and local levels that women's effectiveness and areas of primary interest are demonstrated and from which an agenda of political issues relevant to women, and to the community at large, can be constructed.
>
> "The purpose of the Consultation would be to examine the factors that would encourage women to translate their concern for issues at a local level into an interest in national political participation and for this to elaborate an agenda of issues that can mobilize women's interest in politics and which could be used as a basis of information campaigns, education and action by women in all political parties and associations. For these issues, the Consultation should show how women decision makers in large enough numbers would reach different conclusions, set different priorities and suggest newer solutions than would otherwise be the case."

B. Reporting

7. As recommended in Commission resolution 33/2, and as requested in General Assembly resolution 45/127, the Secretary-General will submit the results of the Consultation to the Assembly at its forty-sixth session. The preparations for the Consultation, its results and the action taken by the Assembly will be

available to the Commission at its thirty-sixth session for consideration as part of the priority theme under the rubric of peace, "Equal participation in all efforts to promote international co-operation, peace and disarmament".

II. PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSULTATION

A. Governments

8. General Assembly resolution 45/127 urged Governments to participate actively in the Consultation, and for this purpose to designate women who currently hold leadership positions in government and national institutions and organizations or are considered to have the potential for high public office. As the report of the Secretary-General to the Assembly (A/45/489, para. 73) noted: "Ideally, each country would send one or several women who currently hold office in government, political parties, unions or interest associations and who are considered to have the potential for high office."

9. A note verbale was sent to all Member States in December 1990, in which Governments were invited to designate participants to the Consultation. For planning purposes, it was requested that each Government should indicate to the Division for the Advancement of Women, by 15 February 1991, whether it planned to participate, and how many participants it would send.

10. Subsequently, in January 1991, a communication was sent to those Governments that then had a woman as elected Head of State or Government inviting that person to participate in the Consultation.

B. Non-governmental organizations

11. As noted above, the Council in its resolution 1990/15, also recommended maximum participation by non-governmental organizations in the Consultation. Such organizations will be invited to participate as observers. In order to maximize their participation, non-governmental organizations at both the national and international levels may wish to organize forums at the national or international level in advance of the Consultation and to forward their results to the Secretariat in order to be available to the Consultation.

III. PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONSULTATION

A. National level

12. National level preparatory activities are not formally required. However, in view of the purpose of the Consultation, Governments and non-governmental organizations may wish to organize seminars, forums or other events in which the issue of women in politics could be explored in the national context. This could serve to brief participants as well as to promote interest in the issue at the national level.

B. Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Women in Public Life

13. Substantive preparations will be made for an Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Women in Public Life to be convened at Vienna, from 21 to 24 May 1991. The Expert Group will examine ways in which women currently participate in public life and decision-making, working together in

organizations or as individuals to affect the welfare and development of their communities and society. It will identify the issues that encourage women to become active in public affairs and decision-making, and will examine their activity and its effect on local, regional, national and international aspects of global issues, such as development, economic growth and security, the environment, social welfare, peace and human rights. It will analyse the factors, such as cultural attitudes, institutional constraints, patterns of coverage in the mass media and unshared responsibilities in the home, that may hinder women's full participation in public life and decision-making, and draw conclusions therefrom. On the basis of the evidence presented, the Expert Group will also identify those issues most likely to elicit active political involvement from women throughout the world in the 1990s. This identification will be presented in the form of a draft to be considered by the Consultation.

14. The Expert Group will consist of scholars who have undertaken studies in the field of political participation of women, drawn from all regions. In addition, organizations of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, will participate together with representatives of intergovernmental bodies. Non-governmental organizations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, may participate as observers.

15. The Expert Group will be able to draw on policy analysis of the participation of women in decision-making prepared for the Commission in 1989 and 1990 (E/CN.6/1989/7 and E/CN.6/1990/2), which use data from 1987. In addition, reports for the Expert Group are being prepared covering the relevant issues in developed countries and developing countries, and on an international basis, including an update of the 1987 information on the incidence of women in decision-making. Finally, in addition to the case-study on the Participation of Women in Decision-making for Peace, a case-study on Sweden, 1/ similar case studies have been commissioned for Costa Rica, Greece, India and Senegal, which are expected to be available at the Consultation, and studies for other countries may be commissioned. Also, a publication will be available synthesizing information on the Expert Group Meeting on Equality in Political Participation and Decision-making, held at Vienna, from 18 to 22 September 1989.

C. Mass media

16. As the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/45/489, para. 75) noted, the success of the Consultation will depend on the level of national participation, the extent to which the preparations and the Consultation itself receive attention in national and international media, and the degree to which precise, multi-partisan issues can be identified and agreed upon. An effort is being made to interest mass media in the issue by a series of press releases and briefing of media representatives. A brochure on the Consultation is being prepared jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Austria. Other media events will be organized subject to the availability of extra-budgetary funding.

1/ Participation of Women in Decision-making for Peace: Case-study on Sweden (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.IV.7).

17. A special exhibition of photographs of female political leaders in different countries and at different levels is being prepared and, after presentation at the Consultation, will be published as a book.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONSULTATION

18. The Consultation itself will take place at the Hofburg Conference Centre, at which facilities have already been arranged. It is proposed that the formal opening session should be organized to provide maximum media coverage. It should be noted that conference servicing resources will permit only one meeting at a time in all official languages. Following the opening session, it is proposed that regional caucuses should be held, one purpose of which would be to begin a process of electing a spokesperson from each region who would participate in the presentation of the final declaration of the Consultation, and another purpose would be to permit the exchange of views on regional bases.

19. The work of the Consultation would then proceed on the basis of discussions of up to five clusters of issues that will have been identified by the Expert Group and included in a draft declaration. It is proposed that two hours should be devoted to each cluster. Given the time available and the number of participants who might wish to speak, statements would have to be concise. The final working session should agree on the text of a declaration on women in politics that could be presented in a final session, for which extensive media coverage would be sought. The declaration and other results of the Consultation would be transmitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General.